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Gentle-heart" Stories.

By *Barbara Yechton,*
Author of Christine's Inspiration &c.



Roland
"Gentle-heart"

ROLAND "GENTLEHEART"

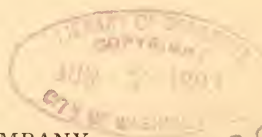
BY

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AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

TO

THE BRAVE LITTLE KNIGHT

DOUGLAS ROSEBERRY HOBART

ROLAND "GENTLEHEART."

ROLAND LEDGERWOOD's father was an artist, and Roland was his only child. They lived on the top floor of a building on Washington Square, and nurse Ann kept house for them, for Roland had no mamma. After a long illness she had been laid to rest in a quiet little church-yard in sunny France, when Roland was barely five years old; and after that the little boy and his papa and nurse had moved about from place to place so frequently, and there had been so many strange things to see and hear, that Roland might have forgotten his mamma, had it not been for the picture of her

which his papa had painted, and which went with them everywhere, and for the deeply interesting stories about her that nurse used to tell him.

Nurse Ann had been with Roland's mamma's family before she married his papa; and when Mr. Ledgerwood wrote to tell her about her young mistress's illness, she willingly went all the way from America to France to be with her to the end, and then stayed on to take care of Roland. She was tall and thin; some people considered her ugly, and Roland sometimes thought her cross; but she was really very devoted to the little fellow, and he loved her dearly. The old nurse was not fond of what she called "furrin' parts," and glad enough was she when Mr. Ledgerwood announced his intention of returning to America, and still more

pleased when they were comfortably settled in the apartments in Washington Square.

Roland liked it, too. He was a big boy now; nine years old—"going on ten;" straight as an arrow and well grown for his age, with very beautiful soft, dark eyes, and short, reddish brown hair that curled all over his head. These, with the kindly expression of his mouth and the fine healthy color in his cheeks, made Roland a very pretty boy, and the wide embroidered turned-over collars and cuffs which his papa liked him to wear gave the little fellow a very picturesque appearance.

Roland and his papa were great friends; they took walks together, and had long talks about all sorts of things; and when Mr. Ledgerwood could spare time to read to his little

son, or tell him stories of when he and uncle Brian were boys together at home and school and college, Roland's happiness was complete. Uncle Brian was papa's only brother and Roland's hero. Though the little boy had never met his uncle, he knew that Colonel Ledgerwood was big and strong and very brave; that though he was a strict disciplinarian, all the men in his regiment loved him dearly and would do anything for him. Roland knew, too, why it was that his papa called uncle Brian, "Gentleheart." "Brian is the bravest and gentlest man I have ever known," Mr. Ledgerwood would say. "You look like him, Roland; I only hope you may grow up to be just such a man as he is. *He* has a quick temper, too, but he keeps it well under control." Then Roland would get

red and hang his head, for his quick temper was this little boy's chief fault.

"I do wish I knew how uncle Brian manages to keep from getting angry," he said very earnestly to nurse, one day. In a burst of rage that morning he had torn his pretty little sketch - book into shreds, and had been so rude to nurse that papa had been obliged to punish him, after making him apologize to nurse, who was only too willing to forgive her boy.

"The reason's plain when once you know Mr. Brian—begging his pardon—the colonel. It's beca'se he knows where to go for stringth." Then she added hastily, as Roland's lips parted for a question: "No, I can't tell you 'bout it, child, I don't know how. Ask your uncle when he

comes—you know he'll be here in a short while now."

And papa had said the same thing: "Ask your uncle Brian about it. He can explain all that better than I can." So Roland waited anxiously for his uncle's arrival, and in the meantime he made up his mind that he would try very hard to be more like uncle Brian, and more patient and gentle; he *didn't* want his hero to hear a bad account of him.

Not every day, however, could Mr. Ledgerwood devote himself to his little son. There were days and days together when he remained in his studio, painting steadily from early morn until the afternoon shadows began to fall. Sometimes Roland was his model, standing or sitting or lying very patiently in one position while his father painted as fast as he could,

with tight-set lips and brows drawn into a deep furrow between his eyes. Mr. Ledgerwood did not like him to talk at such times, and Roland used to get very tired of being so still and silent; but all the fatigue and tiresomeness were forgotten as soon as they were over, and his father kissed and praised him for being such a splendid model.

And when Mr. Ledgerwood's picture, "Sir Galahad," was accepted at the Academy, and everybody spoke so highly of it, the little boy's heart used to swell with pride to hear his father tell people: "That is Roland's picture, as well as mine. I never could have painted it without his help."

Mr. Ledgerwood had told his little son the story of King Arthur's young knight—how he had been chosen to

find the Holy Grail because of his holiness and purity and gentleness. And, though Roland did not know it, the expression which made Sir Galahad's face so beautiful in the picture had been on his own childish countenance as, while posing in the enforced quiet of the studio, he had repeated over and over to himself the lines which were to go with the drawing :

“ My strength is as the strength of ten,
Because my heart is pure.”

The little boy pictured in his vivid, childish imagination all that his father had told him about the brave young knight's riding away on his milk-white steed from the court of the famous king—the “court” in Roland's mind being an amphitheatre—very like the interior of the Madison

Square Garden, where he had once been—in the open air, filled with fair ladies and brave knights in gay attire and shining armor, like the colored plates in his father's quaint old copy of "Ye knightes of Kinge Arthvr's Rovnde Table." How he would have enjoyed being a knight! thought Roland, and riding off that way. He would have been as brave as Sir Galahad, and he would have tried to be as good—of course, then there wouldn't have been so many disagreeable things happening all the time to try his temper. And how bravely he would have protected all the distressed princesses and damsels that he met! The little fellow's chivalrous heart throbbed quicker, his eyes lighted up. Just then his father looked up, caught the exalted expression on the child's face, and, working

desperately, transferred it to his canvas.

On the mornings that Roland was not needed in the studio he went down to the next floor and "said" his lessons with Freddie Hibbard, to a young gentleman who came every day to teach the two little boys. Freddie was about Roland's age, but Roland was not very fond of him—in fact, he thought Freddie a very rude boy to make the horrible faces at him that he did on every possible occasion, without the slightest provocation, and he often wondered what his papa and nurse Ann would say if they could hear the way Freddie spoke to his big sister Madeleine.

Madeleine was about fourteen; a tall, fair girl, with soft blue eyes and yellow wavy hair that hung about her shoulders; Roland thought she

looked like the pictures of the beautiful golden-haired "princesses and damsels" in his favorite story-books, and became very devoted to her. Though as fond of exercise as any healthy boy, he would give up a game in the park any afternoon to sit in the big chair near the window with Madeleine, and hear her read aloud some story that they both liked. More than once, too, his limited amount of pocket-money went for stiff little bouquets, made up of wired roses surrounded by a fringe of coarse ferns, which he presented to her with a shy grace that Madeleine thought "perfectly beautiful," and for which she always gave him a kiss.

Madeleine knew all about Roland's deep admiration for his uncle, and how anxiously he looked forward to

meeting his hero; so she rejoiced with him with all the warmth that could be desired when the little boy whispered eagerly one morning, at the school-room door, that uncle Brian was expected that afternoon.

Freddie made himself particularly disagreeable that morning—kicking Roland's shins under the table, making hideous faces, and firing tiny paper balls at him whenever Mr. Johnston's eyes were turned the other way; and had it not been that Roland was too happy over his good news to quarrel, there would have been an outburst of anger from the quick-tempered little boy. As it was, between his excitement and the irritation caused by Freddie's intermittent attentions, Roland stumbled over his lessons in a fashion very unusual to him, and which called forth a re-

proof from his teacher. Roland was very sorry to have this happen to-day; he would so much have liked a good record "all round" for uncle Brian's benefit. Still, he thought to himself, as an offset to that, he was glad he hadn't got angry with Freddie when he teased so; he fancied that uncle Brian wouldn't have got angry; perhaps he—Roland—might yet be as gentle as his soldier uncle. Papa said the bravest men were always the gentlest; then Freddie couldn't be brave, for he certainly wasn't gentle; he teased and bullied his sister, and his playmates in the park. Roland had heard that he tormented the "little boys"—all those who were younger than nine, "going on ten"—until they sometimes cried. That was Freddie's way of having fun, but then he had no splendid

artist father, and his papa was away most of the time, and no soldier uncle—he was really to be pitied, poor Freddie !

Whistling merrily, Roland bounded lightly up the steps to his own rooms, to be met at the door by nurse, who was evidently in a state of subdued excitement. "I was just comin' to fetch you," she informed him at once. "Your uncle Brian is here, an' as soon as you've put on your velvet suit an' best collar, an' had your face an' hands washed, an' your hair brushed, an' a clean handkercher' in your pocket, you're to go in an' be interjuiced."

"Oh, I'm good enough, I'll go in just as I am," said Roland, eagerly. Besides being anxious to see uncle Brian, he knew by experience what a severe ordeal dressing for such a

state occasion would be under nurse Ann's supervision. "He's my own uncle, you know. I don't see why I should dress up for him, and anyway he'll see me in these clothes to-morrow."

"That's a very different thing," replied nurse, with an air of having settled the matter that provoked Roland. He was tempted to slip by her and make his way to the studio just as he was, but nurse's position in the narrow hall was very much against the successful carrying out of such a project; besides, Roland knew that his papa would be seriously annoyed by any such behavior, particularly before uncle Brian. There was nothing but to submit. "I suppose I'll have to do it," he said, impatiently. "Such nonsense! to be dressed up in my best clothes for my own

uncle, when I'm going to see him every day now!"

Without a moment's loss of time nurse bore him off to his own apartment and began operations. She washed his face and ears with a great deal more vigor than Roland thought at all necessary, considering it had all been done already that morning; brushed his hair hard, adjusted his collar (he was thankful his cuffs were sewed in the sleeves of his velvet coat) in her usual emphatic manner, then gave him a sounding kiss on the cheeks still shining from the liberal use of soap, and pushed him into the hall with the parting admonition: "Now go in, an' behave like a little gentleman."

With a fast-beating heart Roland knocked at the studio door, and at his father's word pushed aside the

heavy portière and entered the room. What he saw was a big man sitting in a big chair by the window—a man who was dressed in citizen's clothes ; had gray hair and a gray beard and was quite bald ! Could *this* be uncle Brian ? Roland was so disappointed that a great lump came into his throat, which he had hard work to swallow down. He had been told that uncle Brian was handsome, he knew he was good, and unconsciously the little boy had come to imagine him a grand-looking personage—perhaps like some great knight of old, only with a dazzling modern uniform, and, above all things, a sword, and here he was dressed like any ordinary person—and *bald* !

What uncle Brian saw was a straight little figure in a picturesque velvet suit, and a lovely childish face

whose first expression of shy delight changed to keen disappointment as the dark eyes met his own. "Is this your boy, Aleck?" he asked, holding out his hand to the child. "I hope we're going to be great friends, Roland." Even in his confusion Roland noticed in what a kind voice the big man spoke, and the next moment he was on his uncle's knee, his face buried in his shoulder.

But notwithstanding Roland's disappointment, he and uncle Brian became good friends, and in a few days the real uncle Brian held a higher place in his little nephew's affections than had the ideal hero of old. They went for walks together when papa was too busy to leave his painting, and uncle Brian told stories of his soldier life among the Indians that fairly thrilled Roland, and yet the big

soldier was so sympathetic and gentle that Roland even confided to him the way Freddie teased him, and how hard it was for him to keep his temper when things did not go as he wanted them. And then one day when they were on this subject uncle Brian said: "Roland, I wonder if you have ever heard of the very greatest Knight the world has ever known."

"Oh, I know of a lot of them," answered Roland, eagerly—he did so love to talk about those old warriors. "King Arthur, and Sir Galahad, and Richard 'Lion-heart' and Godfrey of Boulogne, oh, and there's 'Saint' Louis of France—he's my favorite of all."

"And do you know who was their Pattern—the Knight they followed?"

Roland looked surprised—"I don't

know," he said, after a little thought, "do you?"

"Yes," said uncle Brian, and there was a sweet earnestness in his voice that impressed the little boy: "the highest pattern of knighthood that has ever been given to men to follow is that set by Jesus Christ our Lord."

Roland's eyes opened to their widest extent: "Why, uncle Brian," he cried, breathlessly, "*He* wasn't a Knight—was He?"

"Wasn't He? What made up a knight in olden times?"

"Well," said Roland, thoughtfully, "they had to be good, and brave—and holy—like Galahad, and kind to everybody, little children, and poor damsels, and princesses—and they were gentle—at least the best of them were. Now was He all these things?"

"Our Lord Jesus was all that and more," answered Colonel Ledgerwood. "He was good with the highest kind of goodness, He was perfectly fearless, and so brave that no fear of death or any consequences to Himself could ever make Him do wrong. He was holy—for He never sinned, though He had to meet and overcome the same temptations that come to us. His kindness and love were without limit—He blessed little children, He rescued all women from degradation and lifted them to a place of safety—you will understand this part better when you are older; and He taught men to love one another, and be kind and gentle, not only to their friends but to their enemies. Isn't that being the truest kind of a knight?"

"Y-e-s," said Roland in the same

thoughtful tone; "but, uncle Brian—the knights were real fighters."

"So must you be now, dear lad, to be a loyal knight. I pray that you may always have strength to fight and overcome the sins and temptations that come to everybody—little children as well as grown people. There are knights to-day, Roland, just as there were hundreds of years ago, only the enemies that they fight now are their sins. Your quick temper is your enemy, dear, and as a true knight of the Cross you must be ever on the alert to keep it under. Jesus has been a little Boy, He will understand, and if you ask Him for help you will be able to come off victor."

The idea was very strange to Roland at first, but the more he thought about it and talked it over with uncle Brian the better he liked the feeling

that he, too, was a knight just as much as ever were those he loved to read about. He told Madeleine all about his talk with uncle Brian, and she was very much interested. "I do wish Freddie 'd try to be a knight," she said. "He's got so wild and naughty since mamma has been ill and papa away travelling so much."

"Yes," said Roland, with sympathy and a keen recollection of Freddie's behavior in general. "Do you suppose," he added, hesitatingly—he did so hate to share uncle Brian with Freddie—"that he might be different if uncle Brian talked with him?"

"Oh, I wish he would," cried Madeleine, eagerly. "I know he's all the time talking of Colonel Ledgerwood—since the day you all went

to Governor's Island, when the colonel wore his full uniform."

"Yes, didn't he look splendid! Don't you think he's handsome?" a little anxiously.

"Indeed, I do," answered Madeleine, warmly.

"Of course, he's a little—that is—a good deal bald," went on Roland, touching upon what was still rather a tender point with him; "but then, you know, that isn't really anything, you don't notice it when he's got his hat or cap on."

"Oh, that's nothing at all," said Madeleine, quickly. "Why, my papa's bald—more than your uncle is. He says—though he may mean it in fun—that all great men get bald early because they have to think so much and have so many responsibilities."

"Oh—I see," Roland said, slowly. He was glad Madeleine had told him that, after that he wouldn't have had one hair more on uncle Brian's head. "I must go now," he said, presently, rising—this interview had taken place on the stairs where he and Madeleine often sat to talk—"and I'll see if I can ask uncle Brian to talk to Freddie—perhaps he will. Good-by."

"I do hope he will," answered Madeleine. "Good-by," then she went in her apartments and Roland ran upstairs.

Roland had a struggle with himself before he could make up his mind to tell uncle Brian about Freddie—the little boy did hate to share his splendid much-loved uncle with Freddie. Freddie had such a lordly way about him, he might take entire possession of uncle Brian. It was a hard

struggle for a while ; then Roland remembered Whose knight he was, and what was a true knight's duty, and the result was that he went straight to his uncle ; told him the whole story and pleaded for him to love Freddie with an earnestness that made Colonel Ledgerwood very happy, for he knew just how much Freddie had, and still annoyed the little fellow. " Good-night, ' Gentleheart,' " he whispered, when he kissed the little boy at bedtime ; and Roland wondered why his papa also bade him so tenderly " God keep you, dear son."

Uncle Brian went away not long after this, to his military post on the frontiers, but before he went he had a long walk and talk with Freddie, Roland having given up his right for

that once. No one ever heard what passed between them, but I am glad to tell you that since then Madeleine says he certainly is improving in his manners ; and Roland and he are better friends now. This winter both the boys have attended the same public school, and Roland is thrown more among boys than ever in his life before. He reads less and plays more these days, but he has by no means forgotten his talks with uncle Brian nor Whose knight he is. As proof of this I will let you read this paragraph which was in Mr. Ledgerwood's last letter to uncle Brian :

“ Our boy is doing well at home and in school. He is trying very earnestly to overcome his quick temper, and to be brave and patient

and gentle in all the details of his daily life. I think he begins to deserve the name I have given him—your dear old surname, Brian, of 'Gentleheart.' "

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